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ABSTRACT

Canadian Indians have long been represented by stereotypes presented by non-native writers. Only recently have Indians begun to create their own literature and re-examine historic sources of native speech and tales. This paper traces early European views of the bloodthirsty native and the noble savage, but contrasts them with recorded comments of Indians on the white man, his love of money and his bearded face. It demonstrates that another stereotype of the native American was created by egalitarians in the mid-twentieth century: the Indian as victimized; dispossessed; and cultureless. Although literature about natives by non-natives is often sympathetic and perceptive, writers have a tendency to portray every aspect of the lives of native people as problematic. Strengths of the culture may be ignored or unrecognized. Native literature emphasizes communal living and a sense of place; quests lead home to the elders. The style is often influenced by oral narratives. This paper examines several examples of contemporary native literature that speak from the native point of view. It concludes that young natives should not be reading what it is to be native by James Fenimore Cooper, but from the numerous natives writing today. (DHP)

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ED309897

STEREOTYPING OF NATIVE PEOPLE
IN LITERATURE

Presented by: Dr. Agnes Grant

Fluff and Feathers Conference

Woodland Cultural Centre

Brantford, Ontario

October 28, 1988

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The Woodland Cultural Centre has been the scene of many "firsts" and including "Native Literature" as a topic for discussion when examining stereotyping is another "first". Multitudes of studies have been done on the position of minority cultures which were overwhelmed by conquering majorities or at least by more powerful forces. But oddly, colonizing literature receives scant attention. And yet, in literature, colonizers have one of their most powerful tools. It is true that our present human rights codes, our defamation and libel laws are supposed to protect minorities from gross and overt discrimination, but we have no laws, no mechanisms, whereby we can deal with the phenomenon of rendering people invisible. And there is no aspect of society that is more guilty of rendering people invisible than literature.

I am not going to go into historic reasons for rendering Indians invisible -- considerable writing has been done in that area. The English writer, Rudyard Kipling, called it "the white man's burden" -- this task of Christianizing and Europeanizing aborigines all over the world. Hand-in-hand with religion went a capitalist society based on private ownership of land and property, a society that simply could not allow a continuation of traditional lifestyles based on communal ownership of resources and co-operation.

What I plan to do is take some of the most commonly held stereotypes -- compare what mainstream society writers were saying at that particular time in history with what Natives were saying at that time. What mainstream writers said has been well publicized, what Native people said is only being uncovered and researched and published now. Then I want to spend some time on contemporary stereotypes and how they are still influencing readers of literature today.

Before I do that, I want to comment on your press release. It stated that Indians are defined as "other" and the rest of the world is "we". It's a concept I understand perfectly since my parents were German immigrants in 1926. We accepted all the school system's propaganda about the superiority of the British ways and dutifully memorized poems about the "Spires of Oxford", whatever they were. We memorized so well that my sisters and I all graduated from university.

But we always knew that what we were learning was not about us. Our identity was deeply rooted in the German heritage and what was really relevant and meaningful in our lives was what we heard and read at home in the German language. What values we learned to live by came from our home. Never, for one moment, did we identify as Canadians first when we were children -- that requires a maturity children don't have. We were "us" and the rest of the world was "them" -- of-course this changed as we grew older and were assimilated into the "them" group. For many Native people this dichotomy still exists. We have three natural born children and two adopted Indian children. When our adopted son was killed accidentally at the age of 19 a close relative said, "Well, at least it is not one of "our" children."

Having children of two clours opened our eyes to many realities about our society. It had its lighter moments, too. My mother was a very loving, big-hearted person. She loved her Indian grandchildren as dearly as our natural born children and always treated them the same. But she also took her religion very seriously and literally. Her great love and concern was for me. She said, "Now don't get to loving those children too much because your know, when you die you will go to the white people's heaven and they will go to the coloured people's heaven. There is no difference between the heavens but you will miss your children so." What can one say?

Jon Stott, in his preface to Native Literature in the Curriculum says,

Artistic expression can be viewed, in part, as an attempt to transform "otherness" into "ourness". By ordering and shaping the diversity of the world beyond the self, the artist achieves a measure of control, makes the external into something of his own or her own and communicates the vision to others.¹

This "otherness", transformed into "ourness" has not happened for Native people in literature, yet. Literature portraying Natives as an integral part of Canadian society is a relatively recent phenomenon and a very rare one, I might add. Whereas Native art, once considered bizarre, has been assimilated in all that is Can-

adian, in fact, much that is Canadian is recognizable by its very Indianness, no such phenomenon has happened in literature. Too often books about Natives written by non-Natives are still viewed as the best interpretation of Native cultures. Native readers have the right to expect that masterpieces of their living tradition should form a part of Canadian literature. No body of Canadian literature can be truly representative of Canada without literature written by aboriginal people themselves. It was not until the 1950s and 60s that Native people began to express themselves to any extent in creative writing, but the traditional literature has always been there, and today Native people are using every form of creative expression available.

The earliest stereotype, of course, was the simple primitive, a stereotype due in no small measure to the Jesuits and Recollects. They needed to portray Indians as uncivilized, simple, superstitious, innocent children of God, ripe for conversion and, above all, dependent on the missionaries. The missionaries needed to convert them and teach them decent European morals and for that they needed financing. The Jesuits recorded their experiences (for more reasons than just to raise money, in all fairness to the Jesuits). Back home their writings were read eagerly -- and if an occasional war-whoop or burning of a priest added drama, so much the better.

But what were the Indians saying at this time? The Jesuits did record many of the Indians' statements -- they have just not been a part of the education of most Canadians. In about 1654 a seventy-year-old Huron was told that God had no pity on him because He had allowed a stroke to deprive him of the use of his arm. The old man was incredulous that this should be interpreted as God's will. He replied,

What! Would you wish that there were no dried
trees in the woods and no dead branches on a tree
that is growing old? (Jesuit Relations, XXVIII, 1645-
46, p. 77)₂

We also find that Indians were not too impressed with bearded Europeans; they found beards odd and some even believed they

weakened the intelligence. A Huron, on seeing a bearded Frenchman for the first time, said,

O, what an ugly man! Is it possible that any woman would look favourably on such a man?

(Gabriel Sagard, The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons, 1832).³

The Jesuits set the tone for the paternalistic representation of the Indians, which was generally used by all writers. This stereotype changed when European rivalries over land were brought to North America. The Indians were caught in the fur trade and were forced to take sides. No longer perceived as child-like children of God, they became blood-thirsty savages. And my goodness, the wealth of writing from this period!

Dr. Joseph Doddridge (on the American side of the Revolutionary War) wrote that:

We (the Americans) carried on a war with the English, in which we observed the maxims of civilized warfare, with the utmost strictness...

But the British allied themselves with the Mohawks, or as Doddridge put it:

...with the murderous tomahawks and scalping knife of the indian (sic) nations around our defenseless frontiers, leaving these barbarous sons of the forest to their own savage mode of warfare, to the full indulgence of all their native thirst for human blood.

Do I correctly interpret this as saying that the Americans killed people politely? Did they say, "Excuse me sir" or "Pardon the intrusion, madam, but I'd like to kill you."? Doddridge goes on to say that the Americans were forced to

adopt the indian mode of warfare, in all its revolting and disgusting features...

in order to protect themselves from the British and their allies. (Dr. Joseph Doddridge, Notes on the Settlement Indian Wars of the Western Part of Virginia and Pennsylvania).⁴

Not too much comment from Indians themselves survives from this time -- or perhaps I am just not aware of it. It was understandably a stressful period and one can imagine the terrible decisions that Native people had to make. The horror of this time period for Indians is described so well by Daniel Boone. His occupation was Indian fighter. In his biography he tells how they pursued 46 warriors into a house, how an Indian woman shot and killed one of the Americans with a bow and arrow and how this enraged them. He goes on,

Now we shot them like dogs, and then set the house on fire and burned it up with the 46 warriors in it. I recollect seeing a boy who was shot near the house. His arm and thigh were broken and he was so near the burning house that the grease was stewing out of him. In this situation he was still trying to crawl along; but no murmer escaped him though he was only twelve years old. So sullen is the Indian when his dander is up that he had sooner die than make a noise or ask for mercey.⁵

This, supposedly, was the American civilized warfare. This treatment of Indians was condoned -- the blood-thirsty savages deserved everything they got. This biography of Daniel Boone was written as late as 1940 and it received the Newberry Award for excellence in children's literature that year.

The Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713 and France ceded Acadia to the British. A Jesuit recorded this reply when he told a group of Indians about the peace.

It is well that the Kings should be at peace; I am very glad, and I no longer have any difficulty in making peace with thee. It is not I who have been striking thee for twelve years, it is the Frenchman who has used my arm to strike thee. It is true, we were at peace. I had even hurled away my hatchet, whither I knew not; and while I was in repose upon my mat, thinking of nothing, some

young men brought me a message -- "My son, the Englishman has struck me, help me avenge myself; take thy hatchet and strike the Englishman." I, who have always listened to the word of the French Governor, I sought my hatchet... Now when the Frenchman tells me to lay it down, I throw it far away, that we may no longer see the blood with which it is reddened. Therefore, let us live in peace, I am agreed. (Jesuit Relations, LXVII, 1716-27, pp. 207-9)

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Well, the wars between the French and British, the British and Americans came to an end. Frontiers were open for settlement. Indians were no longer needed for the fur trade or feared in warfare, so became irrelevant. All over the world colonization was destroying aboriginal life styles and philosophers like Hobbs and Rousseau expressed concern over the wanton destruction of aborigines and romanticized a "harmony with nature" life-style. "Noble savage" became the catch-word of the day. Indians were finally acknowledged as human beings, slavery was abolished in the British Empire and the Aborigines Protection Association was formed. It was Alexander Pope who wrote those immortal lines:

Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk or milky way;
Yet simple nature to his hope has giv'n
Behind the cloud-topped hill, a nobler heav'n.

7

Poor Lo became well known. The poet's words were misinterpreted and Lo was looked upon as a specific Indian person. Lo still needed rescuing, of course, by teaching him how to farm, by protecting him from "bad" white people.

What was Lo like at this time? Well, he took many forms, of

course. Some Canadian Indians had not yet had their first brush with the white man but most had been affected by the fur trade.

A contemporary of Pope's was Peter Jones (1802-56). Jones was an Ojibway, the first Native Methodist minister in Canada. He travelled in Europe and in 1831 recorded his impressions.

The English, in general, are a noble, generous-minded people -- free to act and free to think; they very much pride themselves on their civil and religious privileges; in their learning, generosity, manufactures, and commerce; and they think that no other nation is equal to them.... Their close attention to business produce, I think, too much worldly-mindedness, and hence they forget to think enough about their souls and their God; their motto seems to be "money, money; get money, get rich, and be a gentleman."

He went on to say that the ladies' bonnets looked like farmers' scoop-shovels, their high heels made them walk on tip toe and reminded him of "snipes that run along the shores of lakes in Canada." (Rev. Peter Jones, History of the Ojibway Indians, with especial reference to their Conversion to Christianity, 1861, pp. 69-70)

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George Henry, like Peter Jones was also Ojibway, also a Methodist minister and also travelled in Europe. He visited Queen Victoria and said of her guards:

They do not shave the upper part of their mouths, but let the beards grow long, and this makes them look fierce and savage like our American dogs when carrying black squirrels in their mouths.

He comments on their social customs and says,

The only fault I see of them, are their too many unnecessary ceremonies while eating, such as allow me Sir, or Mrs. to put this into your plate. If you please Sir, thank you, you are very kind Sir, or Mrs. can I have the pleasure of helping you?

He goes on to say,

Many of the Englishmen have very big stomachs, caused by drinking too much ale and port. (Peter Jones said they were round as toads). Those who drink wine and brandy, their noses look like ripe strawberries.

He misinterprets women hanging onto their men's arms. He reports that British women cannot walk by themselves alone and says the husbands even have to carry the babies! (George Henry, An Account of the Chippewa Indians, who have been travelling among whites in the United States, England, Ireland, France and Belgium, 1848, pp. 3-11)

9

When this phase of protecting the Indians was resolved with the establishment of the reserve system and the final defeat of the Métis at Batoche, Indians lapsed into obscurity. Only the voice of Pauline Johnson has lived -- continuously and miraculously -- but her Indian princess image and showmanship overshadowed her message. Her message on behalf of Indian people was strong and vibrant.

Liberal do-gooders could say, yes, we appreciate Pauline Johnson, we've been terrible but we have rectified injustices of the past by establishing a reserve system, we read Longfellow's Hiawatha (whom Longfellow changed into an Ojibway in cavalier fashion) and we teach our children the "Huron Christmas Carol" -- which teaches that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem but somewhere in eastern Canada. Indians lived on the margins of society, and in literature, in such roles as Injun Joe in Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer.

The next stereotype arose almost a hundred years later. With growing concern for civil rights, egalitarianism and the social issues of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, the Indians again received the attention of creative artists. The Native as symbol became the rage, reaching the ultimate heights of exploitation in Mordecai Richler's The Incomparable Atuk (though Atuk is an Inuit). A new stereotype that had arisen -- as vicious as any other -- the stereotype of a victimized, dispossessed, cultureless

nomad, which still exists today. Indians are portrayed as the "other" more strongly than ever before.

Literature about Natives by non-Natives is often sympathetic and perceptive, much of it written by established Canadian authors. It can perform an invaluable service in helping non-Natives confront their feelings of ambivalence toward Native people. However good it may be, such writing can further isolate and alienate Native people since they have no choice but to identify with the "non-persons". The authors depict the non-Native characters' lack of understanding so well that the Native person remains an enigma to the readers. In some cases, of course, this was intentional like in Margaret Laurence's work. In others -- in Rudy Wiebe's Peace Shall Destroy Many, the bad guy who gets the Mennonite girl pregnant is a Métis -- regarded very much as an Injun Joe type character.

A further problem with current writing about Natives is that as non-Natives include them in their stories they tend to focus on problems and injustices confronting Native people. Though timely and important, the writing is not just. Indians come away with further feelings of entrapment in a stereotype -- the helpless Indian suspended between two cultures and able to cope with neither. Writing such as Ryga's Ecstasy of Rita Joe and W.O. Mitchell's Vanishing Point fall into this category.

Writers have a tendency to portray every aspect of the lives of Native people as problematic; strengths of the culture may be downplayed, ignored or not recognized by the writers. A book such as Alan Fry's How a People Die, which was on high school shelves at least a few years ago, or Mitchell's Vanishing Point (which still is on the Manitoba curriculum today) do nothing to enhance the self-concept of Native readers. Fry attempts to portray life as it "really" is on a reserve, as does W.O. Mitchell. Fry accurately chronicles the devastating influences of alcohol (this was before the Indian Act was revised) and lays the blame on the white men who take the liquor onto the reserve, but he downplays the positive actions of the Indians.¹⁰ The story is told from the point of view of the Indian agent who sees nothing

but evil and despair. His expectations are that the Indians will come to see things his way and allow him to provide solutions. It is a story without hope because Fry does not even suggest that Indians are capable of accepting responsibility for their actions -- or that they should be expected to do so.

Compare How a People Die with Haney Geiogamah's play "Body Indian".¹¹ Geiogamah is a Kiowa playwright. The subject matter is the same -- alcoholism, but it is written from within the culture. The scene is one room, the action is a drinking party. Bobby Lee, who has already lost a leg when drunk when he was run over by a train, wants to go for a cure. He has the money to pay for it but seeks the reassurance and support of his family before he goes. Instead of supporting him they steal his money and in the end pawn his wooden leg.

It is a very depressing play -- I use it in my Native literature courses and many students don't like it. On the first reading the play is funny, very funny. Students recognize themselves and their relatives and often resent the message. It often creates hostility in the class as female students comment on Indian men's drinking in a way they have never had the courage to do outside the class. But it is not only men who drink in the play -- women do too, teenagers follow the examples of the elders. Students accuse me of perpetuating the stereotype of drinking Indians. That disturbs me that they think that because the play has a much deeper meaning, but I continue to use the play because I believe the message is so powerful.

Geiogamah builds his story around the strengths of the people -- the caring, the sharing, the support -- even though it is being used in a destructive way. The values are still there even though these peoples' lives appear to be in shambles. When the women fantasize about what they would do if they had lots of money we find they would buy things for their children, they would buy fresh meat; one woman would bail her son out of jail. The men recall times when they had the physical co-ordination to do traditional dances and speak with pride of having taught them to their sons.

Geiogamah's overriding message is that drinking is a personal, not a cultural problem. People can either help each other overcome alcoholism or they can make it more difficult for each other. Alcoholism has nothing to do with nationality.

Where Native characters are portrayed only from the non-Native point of view they are usually shadowy, secondary figures. This kind of literature cannot possibly have a real message for Native people. Native readers view themselves as real -- and need real literature. That reminds me of a story. Friends went to a restaurant for dinner and their six year old ordered a hotdog. The parents protested that he should have a meal. The waitress, ignoring the parents, asked the child what he wanted on his hotdog. The child told her, then turning to his parents he said, "She thinks I'm real!"

Native people have waited for too long for literature that is real.

So how do we escape stereotypes? I don't think we do. The best we can hope for is a variety of literature, written from within the culture, so there will be writing from different points of view.

I am currently searching for a new text for my Native Studies II course and am tentatively planning to use one called Native People: The Canadian Experience by R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson. It's a good book about Canadian Natives, written by historians and anthropologists. But, as with most history books, Native peoples' points of view are not included. The book is much better than anything else on the market, in my opinion, but it still has this major weakness. It is still historians recycling each others' research though they question much of what was once accepted as factual. Not even one article out of the 26 is written by a Native. In one there is reference to Billy Diamond and the James Bay Treaty -- a pretty factual piece of information. In another there is reference to Edward Ahenakew and Plains mythology -- a pretty safe piece of information. Complex concepts are interpreted

by historians -- so as not to lower standards, I guess. The Ojibway Midewewin, for example, is dealt with without even a reference to Basil Johnston's extensive writing on it.¹² The West Coast potlatches are dealt with without George Clutesi's detailed Potlatch¹³ or Guests Never Leave Hungry¹⁴ the biography of James Sewid, a Kwakiutl Indian. Sewid not only describes the potlatch but puts it into an historical perspective and demonstrates how integral it was to the continuance of the culture. References to Iroquois religion are very skimpy -- and no reference is made to the fact that the Ritual of Condolence is available in John Bierhorst's Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature published in 1974.¹⁵ If Native people are to become familiar with their own masterpieces they will have to be given the opportunity to read about them and to know where they can be found.

Two exceptions exist in the book. Hugh Dempsey, who is married to a Blackfoot, the daughter of Senator Gladstone, wrote the chapter on the Blackfoot and uses some Blackfoot sources. There are also Native voices in the last chapter which is on contemporary issues. The interpretation of the cultures and their histories are still safely in the domain of the historians, the non-Native experts on Native society.

In 1873 the Ojibway of Northwestern Ontario signed Treaty #3. They had successfully stalled negotiations for over a year. Chief Ma-we-do-pe-nais negotiated on behalf of his band. He specified that he wanted \$15 per person for the first year, \$10 thereafter, \$50 per chief per year and an annual sum of "large amounts in writing, say \$125,000 yearly."

He asked for this amount because, as he told the commissioners,
 The sound of the rustling of gold is under my feet
 where I stand; we have a rich country.¹⁶

What he got was \$25 for the chief, \$15 for the councillors and \$5 per band member. In place of the \$125,000 yearly there was a one-time payment of \$1,500 in twine and ammunition and some rudimentary farm equipment. But if we look at what the government is paying

out per band now, the \$125,000 is quite logical. Had this been done in 1873, an economic base could have been established and who knows what the history of the Ojibway of Northwestern Ontario might be today!

So again, the book, Native People: The Canadian Experience renders Indians invisible historically. In historic times they are portrayed as having quaint beliefs, not to be equated with serious religion. They had no thoughts upon meeting white men, they had no insights into what might be happening to them as a result of the meeting. They had no concerns -- for was the white man not equipped with copper pots and sharp knives? Who could ask for more! Indians, historically, are still artifacts for white scholars to interpret according to their particular disciplines.

But we know, and the historians know, that much of what was taking place at the time was recorded from the Native point of view, and we know, and the historians know, that much more information has been passed down through the oral tradition. For the sake of colonization, thinking of the Indians was disregarded in historic times, and for the sake of stalling on aboriginal land claims, constitutional rights and First Nation status, it is still being disregarded today; not to mention the tight control over scholarship by universities and other researchers. If we allow the intrusion of too many Native truths, we are going to have to change radically our treatment of Native people in Canada. I rejoice for the Lubicons and their successful land claims, though perhaps it's too early to rejoice. Only time will tell whether their claims will actually be honoured. But I rejoice that the Lubicons had the political astuteness to put up barricades when a Federal election was pending. They were not granted a hearing because Premier Don Getty and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney have suddenly seen the light regarding Native land claims.

Literature is generally considered an effective vehicle for the transmission and understanding of a culture. It has the power to recreate reality and combine knowledge and feelings in a manner that may be lacking in other disciplines. Art and music

may achieve the same results but in schools, particularly, they are not a required component of every student's school day like reading is. Some literature is used in every reading program and every student has the right to explore literature with familiar cultural content.

The significance of literature can best be understood in terms of the culture from which it springs. It is of considerable importance to readers of all ages to have access to literature which enables them to understand and accept the principles upon which the values and traditions of their particular culture are based. Much emphasis has been placed on correcting historical untruths and I get very concerned when literature is overlooked. The same untruths are perpetuated in literature but they are presented in a more interesting fashion.

As I said at the beginning, literature is one of the strongest tools for spreading propaganda that colonizers have. But reading, and especially reading fiction, has not been a way of life for many Native people so the area has not been challenged to the same extent as other areas have.

The importance of Native literature will be revealed as Natives tell their own stories which will disclose the culture's richness. Then Native points of view will be expressed. Readers will see beauty in the world, beauty that is often invisible or ignored by people from outside the culture.

A particular brand of humour will be present. So often my students enjoy a joke in Cree or Ojibway, then remembering that I am left out because I do not understand very much, they attempt to translate -- but the story usually falls flat. But beyond that, different cultures have different kinds of humour. What I think is funny in a story often puzzles the students -- and from my point of view, they laugh in the strangest places. The first time I used the play "Body Indian" I was surprised to find that students found it funny.

Native literature emphasizes communal living and portrays a life of mingling, caring and sharing. A need for community and

and the rituals of the community pervade the literature. There is a sense of place and a dependence on that place by the characters. Land imagery abounds; Paula Gunn Allen, a Native writer and critic has said, "We are the land!"¹⁷ The land is a spiritual and moral idea, a unifying force and the memories, chants and rituals of a community tie the people to the land.

The rugged individualism of heroes in North American folklore is antithetical to the sense of the community. The sense of alienation from society often is strong, but there is healing. The quest theme always leads back home and back to one's roots. At home elders wait to teach Indian ways to the young who may be floundering in alien cultures or questioning traditional ways.

The style of the literature is often influenced by oral narratives. The shape and content of myths and legends influences what contemporary writers say, therefore it is important to understand traditional myths and legends. Visions and dreams played a vital role in the lives of traditional Indians and their influences are still felt in contemporary writing.

Traditional myths, legends and poetry have always been in print and could long have been incorporated in school programs if the will had been there. May Hill Arbuthnot, who wrote a comprehensive book on children's literature did Native people a great disservice when she said,

(Indian legends) are by and large neither sufficiently dramatic nor well enough organized to command interest... the variants of old world tales collected among the North American Indians gives one the impression that their narrators were incapable even of preserving a good tale, to say nothing of inventing a new one. While this may sound like an extreme statement, as a matter of fact, it is largely true.¹⁸

The book has since been revised and she changed her opinion on Native legends but in the meantime many teacher attitudes were formed by this statement. It was part of the discrediting

process, but what is more influential is that Arbuthnot was saying in effect, "The way I tell stories is the correct way to tell stories, the only way." Indian children come from homes where stories are different -- and the system does not allow for differences. So influential has Arbuthnot's statement been that even today, the emphasis is on Indian legends re-written in European style, even among Native teachers.

I did a legend telling session with some grade five students in a northern community in Manitoba. I used a tape recording of a Cree master-storyteller from northern Saskatchewan.¹⁹ When the session was over the teacher had the kids write me thank-you letters. One little fellow wrote, "This has been the happiest day of my life." Why? I think it was because something from his home, his real identity was allowed into the school -- this in spite of the fact that his teacher was Cree. We train Native teachers so they will "fit" the system. It is not until they get a lot of teaching experience and have co-operative administrators that they allow any "Cree-isms" to creep in.

I want to end my talk with a brief reading from Canadian Native literature at its best. The decision about what to read is difficult, because there is so much to choose from. In the end I selected two authors, Maria Campbell and George Kenny.

Maria Campbell, a woman without formal education, demonstrates many of the attributes of Native literature that I mentioned before. She is a halfbreed from northern Saskatchewan. Her book, Halfbreed, is her autobiography. It tells of her life as a child and though they were very poor, there was lots of love and laughter in her life. Maria had a happy childhood but when her mother died, Maria, then 12 years old had to grow up too fast. She eventually went in search of elusive dreams of toothbrushes and fresh fruit in the city -- where her dreams turned into drugs, booze and prostitution. Finally, having hit rock bottom, she remembers the words of her Cheechum, her great-grandmother, and she is able to pull her life back together. Today Maria lives at

Batoche, at a place called Gabriel's Crossing. She is herself a grannie, a model and an inspiration for many a young Native person. In her book she recalls poignantly the community of her childhood:

I grew up with some really funny, wonderful, fantastic people and they are as real to me today as they were then. How I love them and miss them.²¹

She tells of a Trappers' Convention in northern Saskatchewan. On the way they stopped at Waskesiu in the Prince Albert National Park -- a major resort for both Canadians and Americans.

We stopped at a restaurant for Mom to buy some ice cream. She got as far as the door and came back, looking as if she had seen something awful. Dad went in and came out with the ice cream, grinning from ear to ear. He wanted Grannie to see something special, so we waited for a few minutes while Mom spoke angrily to him in Cree. I was nearly falling off my perch with curiosity to see what was inside when two white-haired ladies came out. They were both wearing two-piece bathing suits. One was quite fat and the other was well built and falling out all over.

(Grannie) covered her face, saying in Cree, "What's wrong with these women?" Mom looked straight ahead. One of the women came over and asked if she could take a picture of us. They wanted a picture of (Grannie) too, but she would not uncover her head, so they left, talking and laughing. Grannie hit (our driver) hard on the back to get him going, and as the car lurched forward I lost my ice-cream. Normally I would have complained until my ice-cream was replaced, but I was too astounded by the sight of these almost naked women who dared to walk among people and not be shy. That was my first impression of American women.

After listening to the presentation on the Hollywood images of Indians yesterday, I was reminded of another section of this book. Maria recalls:

One show I remember was about the Northwest Rebellion. People came from miles around and the theatre was packed. They were sitting in the aisles and on the floor. Riel and Dumont were our heroes. The movie was a comedy and it was awful: the Halfbreeds were made to look like such fools that it left you wondering how they ever organized a rebellion. Gabriel Dumont looked filthy and gross. In one scene his suspenders broke and his pants fell down, and he went galloping away on his scabby horse in his long red underwear. Louis Riel was portrayed as a real lunatic who believed he was god, and his followers were real "three stooges" types. Of course the NWMP and General Middleton did all the heroic things. Everyone around us was laughing hysterically, including the Halfbreeds, but Cheechum walked out in disgust. Many years later I saw the movie again and it made me realize that it's no wonder my people are so fucked up.²³

The second writer I have chosen is George Kenny, a young Ojibway from northwestern Ontario. The reason I chose him is because his writing speaks to other young Indians in a way little literature does. He has captured the essence of what it is to be a young Native with one foot in traditional culture and one in a contemporary, changing life style. He is not caught between two cultures, unable to cope with neither; rather he is caught between two cultures, able to cope in either very well but faced with the endless decisions of all Canadians who live bi-cultural lives. The poem is from a book called Indians Don't Cry.

I don't know this October stranger
each dawn groping for an alarm clock
selecting a blue polyester suit
that used to belong to an indian
from the back forests of northwestern
Ontario.

This autumn stranger washes a once
 familiar face
 runs windburnt fingers over a
 cowlick topped head of black hair
 the exact image of a man I swear
 I once knew.

This October stranger adjusts his
 blue tie,
 flips through documents before sliding
 them into a \$40 briefcase
 and then rides off on a rocking
 subway train
 to his 2nd story office
 on Eglinton Avenue E. in Toronto

I don't know this autumn stranger
 that writes his stories
 and poems
 as if Chaucer himself was kicking
 him along, never letting him rest
 this Indian dedicated to becoming
 published.

I don't know this October stranger
 that left a love of three years
 behind without a
 kiss;
 this autumn stranger that knew
 his 14 year old sister would be
 left all alone in a boarding school
 and yet migrated south...

I don't know this October stranger.²⁴

There has to be a recognition of change in Native literature.
 No culture is static -- so there can be no one right way to teach
 modern Native kids and there can be no one definition of Native

literature. Writers will tell stories in traditional oral narrative style like their elders do; they will write in purely European style like Pauline Johnson did, they will write in a uniquely North American Native style that is evolving. The styles will vary but the content will be uniquely and vibrantly Native, whether it is John Tetso talking about life on the trapline in the Northwest Territories²⁵ or Lee Maracle's anguished book about what it is to be a Native woman in the city today.²⁶

Young Natives should not be reading about what it is to be Native in the writing of James Fenimore Cooper, Rudy Wiebe, W.O. Mitchell or W.P. Kinsella. They should be reading about what it is to be Native in the writing of Pauline Johnson, George Kenny, Maria Campbell, Augusta Tappage, Duke Redbird, Chief Dan George, Bruce Sealey, Ruby Slipperjack, Bernalda Wheeler and her son, Jordan, Beatrice Culleton, Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Silko, Rayna Green, Louise Erdrich, George Barker, Scott Momaday, Alma Green, Basil Johnston, Thompson Highway, Beverly Hungrey Wolf -- and the list goes on and on. There was a time when I could keep up with most of the literature being written by Native people-- that time is long past. I'm sorry I can't keep up anymore, but I'm happy that is how it is.

NOTES

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- ³ Petrone, p.4.
- ⁴ Surtees, Robert, The Original People (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971) p. 29-31.
- ⁵ Daugherty, James, Daniel Boone (New York: Viking, 1940) o. 24.
- ⁶ Petrone, p. 24.
- ⁷ Pope, Alexander.
- ⁸ Petrone, p. 83.
- ⁹ Petrone, p. 88-90.
- ¹⁰ Fry, Allen, How a People Die (Toronto: Doubleday, 1970).
- ¹¹ Geiogamah, Haney, New Native American Drama (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press).
- ¹² Johnston, Basil, Ojibway Heritage (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).

- 13 Clutesi, George, Potlatch (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's, 1969).
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- 16 Morris, Alexander, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians (Toronto: bedfords, Clark and Co., 1862) pp. 60, 62.
- 17 Allen, Paula Gunn, "The Psychological Landscape of Ceremony", American Indian Quarterly, 5, No. 1 (1979), p.6.
- 18 Arbuthnot, May Hill, Children and Books (London: Scott foresman and Co., 1964), p. 12.
- 19 Roulette, Ron, Native Storytelling (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Education, 1981).
- 20 Campbell, Maria, Halfbreed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) p. 25.
- 21 Campbell, p. 39.
- 22 Campbell, p. 39
- 23 Kenny, George Indians Don't Cry (Oakville: Chimo, 1977) p. 34.
- 24 Tetso, John, Trapping Is My Life (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1970).
- 25 Paracle, Lee, I Am Woman (North Vancouver: Write-On Press, 1988).